

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on**  
**Wednesday, 19 February 2020**

Present:

Members: Councillor R Brown (Chair)  
Councillor N Akhtar  
Councillor J Blundell (substitute for Councillor Ridley)  
Councillor J Clifford  
Councillor L Kelly  
Councillor J McNicholas  
Councillor K Sandhu  
Councillor R Singh  
Councillor D Skinner (substitute for Councillor Andrews)

Other Members: Councillors P Akhtar and D Welsh

Employees:

G Holmes, Place Directorate  
C Knight, Place Directorate  
L Knight, Place Directorate  
J Seddon, Place Directorate

Other representatives: Pete Bond, Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)  
Chris Gibbens, National Express (NX)  
Martin Hancock, NX  
Nikki Houghton, NX  
Andy Thrupp, TfWM

Apologies: Councillors A Andrews and G Ridley and J O'Boyle (Cabinet Member)

## **Public Business**

### **54. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **55. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2020 were agreed and signed as a true record. All matters arising from Minute 50/19 headed 'Bus Provision in Coventry' were dealt with in Minute 56 below.

### **56. Bus Innovation in Coventry**

Further to Minute 50/19 headed 'Bus Provision in Coventry', the Committee considered a briefing note of the Director of Transportation and Highways which provided information on the framework of options under the Bus Services Act 2017; national bus funding and opportunities; a breakdown of elements of the levy for the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and how this translated to

specific costs for Coventry; statistics for the recently introduced platinum bus service; UK City of Culture 2021 bus provision; and climate change and electric city. The meeting followed on from the Committee's last meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> February when the Committee had considered Bus Provision in Coventry. A briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator provided an update from this meeting.

Councillors P Akhtar and D Welsh, the Council's representatives on the West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Committee attended the meeting for the consideration of this item. Chris Gibbens, Martin Hancock and Nikki Houghton, National Express, and Pete Bond and Andy Thrupp, Transport for West Midlands, were also in attendance.

The briefing note referred to the legislative framework for bus provision including the 1985 Transport Act which deregulated the bus market. Reference was made to subsequent Transport Acts in 2000 and 2008. The 2008 legislation contained powers to franchise bus services in the event that an authority felt that they were not being provided adequately by private operators. Cornwall Council had been successful in introducing a franchise system.

In 2017 further legislation was introduced providing a new suite of powers to enable stronger, more binding, partnerships known as Enhanced Partnerships, to be introduced, franchising powers with automatic entitlement to Mayoral Combined Authorities, and new powers to introduce ticketing schemes and improved data provision from bus operators. An appendix to the briefing note set out further details of the Act and its powers.

The Committee were informed that in June 2019 the WMCA Board approved moving to an Outline Business Case (OBC) to consider in greater detail the powers and options contained within the Act. This detailed assessment was underway and would be completed in April 2021. The three options under consideration were

- Do minimum (Bus Alliance) as current
- Further deregulated powers (Enhanced Partnerships)
- Regulated powers (Franchising)

There would be opportunities for the Council to have an input during this process.

The Strategic Vision for Bus was approved by the WMCA in November 2018 and was the agreed Vision for the region to set out what was wanted from the bus services. A copy of the Vision was set out at a second appendix.

The briefing note referred to the West Midlands Bus Alliance. The Alliance was a partnership that came into being in 2015 with the aim of delivering improvements across the bus network throughout Coventry and the wider West Midlands. The Alliance was held up at a national level as a leading example of what could be achieved through public and private partnership. Membership was detailed. A summary of its objectives and achievements to date were set out.

The briefing note highlighted recent additional Government funds for buses which included the Department for Transport (DfT) announcing plans to overhaul bus and cycle links for every region outside London, with £5 billion of new funding over 5 years, which was anticipated to be around two thirds bus and one third cycle related. This was in addition to the £50 million recently unveiled for All-Electric Bus Town / City opportunities, the further £70 million set aside for new,

transformational, 'Superbus' networks, and the £30m additional subsidised bus top-up.

Coventry had also secured funding through the Government's Ultra-Low Emission Bus (ULEB) scheme to begin the process of electrifying the city's bus fleet. The newly announced All-Electric Bus Town/City fund provided a potential opportunity to accelerate the process of electrification. There would be a two-stage competition for the available funding. Interested towns and cities needed to submit an expression of interest by 30 April 2020.

To improve current bus services, or restore lost services where needed, the Government would pay an extra £30m to local authorities in 2020/21. It was not yet clear how this £30m would be apportioned and if TfWM, and therefore Coventry, would receive any of it.

The briefing note provided further information on bus services in the city. Overall bus usage stood at around 28 million passenger journeys a year, which had remained fairly constant over the last few years. Details of bus patronage levels for National Express were highlighted which showed an increase of around 10% over the past seven years. There was some evidence that the introduction of 'platinum' services on individual routes had driven this increase in passenger numbers. Coventry Pool Meadow Bus station currently accommodated nearly 5 million passenger movements per annum and 400,000 bus departures, making it one of the highest bus departure locations in the region. Additional information was provided on fares and service reliability.

Government funding was becoming increasingly predicated on bus priority, whether involving bus gates, bus lanes, signal optimisation or any other measures that promoted bus and sustainable access. A good design that promoted public transport provision and reduced the reliance on the private car was key to the backdrop of sustainable travel in Coventry. Details of the current network bus priority were highlighted.

As requested at the previous meeting, the briefing note provided information on the subsidised services in the city. The vast majority of these services were provided on a commercial basis. Data provided by National Express revealed that, out of a total of 60,975 passenger journeys per week, only 1,065 (1.7%) of these were on subsidised services. In terms of revenue, National Express received £500,000 p/a in subsidy for Coventry services from TfWM, against a total income from passenger fares of £27.5 million (1.8%). Also TfWM had estimated that the level of subsidy for Coventry was £1.02 million. This was 11.1% of the total subsidised bus budget for the West Midlands.

The briefing note referred to the region wide Network Performance Board which monitored performance and delivered improvements and to the intention to set up a dedicated Bus Performance Board for Coventry.

With reference to climate change it was noted that improved bus services would reduce reliance on the private car.

The Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 was forecast to generate around 2.5 million visits to the city, and would see a significant increase in travel demand to and from

the city, especially around the major events expected to attract larger audiences. A transport strategy was under development in partnership with the City of Culture Trust, and it was anticipated that the bus would play an important role in getting people to and from events within the city. The Committee were informed that bus based Park and Ride was being considered as part of the transport strategy alongside potential enhancement of existing public bus services and the role that longer-distance coach travel could also play in getting people to and from the city. In addition, investment in the improvement of Pool Meadow Bus Station, within a budget of £1.5m, had already been identified by TfWM and the City Council as an important element of the UK City of Culture Transport Strategy. There was an acknowledgement that, at this stage, bus and train operators were unable to plan for much of their involvement with City of Culture without the necessary programme information.

Pete Bond, Transport for West Midlands gave a joint presentation which provided an overview of the issues set out above.

Members questioned the officers and representatives on a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- Support for the strategic vision for bus
- Justification for the cost of bus journeys in the city compared to the cost of car travel and car park charges
- Details about potential shelf ready bus priority schemes for Coventry
- What was it that would lead to an increase bus patronage
- A concern that buses couldn't provide the convenience of the door to door travel that the car allows
- Details about the levels of risks associated with the three options and in particular the option of franchising bus services
- Clarification about how high levels of public sector intervention in bus services result in higher costs to the public sector
- Further information about the support to City of Culture 2021 by the provision of additional public transport for events
- Details about the proposed improvements at Pool Meadow Bus Station
- Future proposals for the development of apps which provide passengers with real time up to date bus information
- A suggestion to use multi-lingual communications on local buses along with voices of local people for announcements
- Further information about other bus services options and subsidies i.e. the London model
- The availability of statistical data relating to the performance of bus services
- Further details about the Super bus initiative and a request a bid being submitted for Coventry
- Information on the Traffic Commissioners and appropriate contacts for local bus issues
- A request for Scrutiny to have the opportunity to feed into the discussions on the development of the Strategic Outline Business Case for the franchising option.

Councillors Akhtar and Welsh, the Council's representative on the West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Committee, outlined their willingness to report back at future Scrutiny meetings when appropriate.

**RESOLVED that:**

**1) The contents of the briefing note and information presented to the meeting be noted.**

**2) The Committee supports the establishment of the proposed Coventry Bus Performance Board and requests robust lines of accountability to the Council Lead Member for Transportation, with Scrutiny having the opportunity for an overview of the work of the Board as requested.**

**3) Opportunities be provided to allow for Scrutiny to feed into the discussions on the development of the Strategic Outline Business Case for the franchising option.**

**4) The willingness of National Express to work with the City of Culture Trust and the City Council to support increased public transport arrangements during City of Culture events in 2021 be welcomed.**

**5) Support be given to the development of apps which provide passengers with real time up to date bus information to help encourage an increase in bus patronage.**

**6) Support be given to the suggestion to use multi-lingual communications on local buses.**

**7) Support be given to funding bids for Coventry being submitted by Transport for West Midlands for a number of Government initiatives including Electric City and Superbus.**

**8) A further report be submitted to a future meeting in six months with particular reference to City of Culture, Climate Change and the Outline Business Case.**

**57. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2019/2020 and Outstanding Issues**

The Committee noted their work programme for the current municipal year.

**58. Any Other Items of Public Business**

There were no additional items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.05 pm)